A New Father

Even though then President Harry Truman had ordered the integration of the military, for Pvt. Robert G. Vallejos, it was life as usual. Whatever exciting adventure young Vallejos anticipated was eventually doused by discrimination. "Spick" and "greaser" had replaced "bastard" in the mouths of his arrogant, white teammates. Still, Robert had escaped Trinidad, and the life his father wanted him to pursue. The forged enlistment papers did not implicate Dr. Beshaw. Doing so would have exposed the drug distribution plans Frank had for his son. Robert's parents tried their best to get Robert kicked out of the military anyway.

The Army became Pvt. Vallejos' new father, mother, teacher, and doctor. The first two years in the army began in 1948 and became a nurturing safety net for Robert. Discipline, structure, food, education and *pay* were more than he could have hoped for.

Training became a dizzying array of physical skills, survival, defense and endurance. During basic training, Robert was tasked to help suppress fires in California. Having previously fought fires in Colorado, Uncle Sam volunteered Pvt. Vallejos to lead a team of recruits.

"The training instructor says, 'I want you to take these 6 men and get up on that point, make sure that fire doesn't come down that hill.' The wind was coming from that side and if it starts going down that way, not even God would have stopped that fire. Well, we got to the crest (with) these 6 guys. Three of them beat the livin hell out of me and threw me down this little cliff. I wound up getting a piece of manzanita (branch) right through (my) side. The excuse they gave was that I didn't want to fight the fire and was running away."

The bloom was off the rose now. After healing from the impaling of a manzanita branch, Pvt. Vallejos was left to contemplate his future, while cleaning grease traps in the kitchens of the mess hall.

Robert put his focus on countless training manuals he was required to learn. No longer the class clown he was in school for so many years, Pvt. Vallejos buckled down and devoured the overview of aeronautics, artillery, demolition and recognizance. His test scores and practical skills soon exceeded his contemporaries. He was noticed by instructors and commanders. Still, Robert would not be accepted by the guys in his barracks.

"I was charged with theft by a guy that said I stole (his) damn black silk jacket; that had a map of Japan on the back. Well, when I came back from communications school, I was to become the Communications Chief, and this guy hated that. So he decided to frame me with theft. He took that damn jacket and stuffed it in my laundry bag. Then he went and told the company commander somebody stole his jacket. They came and (told) me (they) was gonna search everything (I) have. 'Be my guest.' I said. I didn't know where the hell his jacket was. The first place they looked was in the laundry bag, and the guy says, 'See! I told you!' Well, I went up before the colonel. He looked me straight in the eye and asked, 'Did you steal that jacket?

"I says, no sir, I'm a better soldier than that man that accused me. He's jealous because I was in the top 10 of the communications class, and he failed. He framed me when he found out I was to become the com-chief.' I was never court marshalled, but that's the kind of shit I put up with from the day I went into the military."

Unable to shake the 'spick' legally, his 'teammates' tried one more drastic measure.

"I spent the last 2 1/2 weeks of basic training in the hospital. They beat me so damn bad that's where I wound up; and one of them was a drill instructor! He took me out an said we're gonna find out just how good you are with a rifle. Then they beat the shit outta me out there. So bad they had to call an ambulance, and what was the (reason in) the report? 'I was trying to commit suicide!' "

With a thinly vailed effort towards empathy, Uncle Sam quizzed Pvt. Vallejos on his future desires for assignment. Remembering the constant mail call cries from his parents needing money,

"I could have been stationed in the United States, but because of the way my parents were, I said 'no, no, no, (I want to) go as far away as I can get. I want to go to Japan!"

After leaving basic training in Colorado Springs, Pvt. Vallejos was assigned to the Far East Command (FECOM). He was transported to Japan on the troop ship USS David C. Shanks. Mail call caught up with Pvt. Vallejos with 5 letters from his mother. They were angry, evil and vile in their accusations, testimony to his toxic home life.

The United States became the occupying power in Japan at the end of WWII. The horrific aftermath of dropping the atom bomb, on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, had decimated the willpower of the emperor and his people. Now Private First Class (PFC) Vallejos was initially stationed at Camp Bender, Japan with the 1st Calvary in November 1948. While patrolling the local village as gunner on a quad 50 jeep halftrack, PFC Vallejos did not hesitate in gunning down an armed local man. This was his first kill, and a gut retching glimpse of the horrors to come.

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The propensity to kill was lacking in the American G.I. Following WWII, statistics showed only an average of 15% of combat rifleman fired their weapons in battle. Even though a soldier would not run away, he still refrained from killing, even if his life was on the line. (Still the U.S. won that war**.) But for the military, these statistics were shocking. They sought to alter the basic training of G.I.'s in order to overcome the aversion to kill another human being. The psychology altering training tactics had focused on making the American G.I. relish killing. It was so effective that starting with the Korean War, about 50% of all infantry soldiers were firing their weapons. (**But the U.S. lost in Korean and Vietnam!)

Unheard of in WWII, U.S. soldiers began to engage in enemy torture, massacres of civilians and even fragging (killing) their own officers.

(Encyclopedia of the US at War, 1998, Scholastic Ref. Book: English & Jones)

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Soon after his arrival the hard-core technical training began. That December PFC Vallejos attended gunnery school at Camp Crawford in Sapporo, Japan. January thru April of 1949 found Robert in Osaka, Japan for Commando training with the 5th Ranger Battalion. Several temporary duty (TDY) assignments put now Specialist (SPC) Vallejos through 155 howitzer gunnery school, flight training with the 8th Air Force Liaison School, communications school and winter ski training. By January 1950, SPC Vallejos attended CIA/CID Intelligence School for the 10th Logistical Command, at Karlsruhe Castle in Pforzheim, Germany. Finally, in April 1950, Robert was sent to sniper school for 45 days – *odd*, because his enlistment was almost up.

While in transport back to Japan, the men were informed that their enlistment was to be extended – all orders home were rescinded. They would be going to Korea on the first wave of U.S. military action, against the North Koreans and their allies of China and Russia.

Fuck.